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ABSTRACT

Community colleges, facing a decline in the 18 to 24 year old college age population, should adopt the marketing philosophy of private enterprise to discover and meet the unsatisfied educational needs of non-traditional, though potential, clients. The adoption of this philosophy, while necessitating that colleges provide education on terms dictated by the student, would make the 70% to 80% of the United States work force (about 100 million people) who have not completed or even begun their higher education available as potential community college students. This market includes those individuals who require one or two specific courses to meet immediate occupational needs. It also includes older adults desiring to fill educational gaps caused by career and/or family obligations, who may have career retraining, job skill improvement, or recreational needs that can be met by the community college. A third potential group are those individuals whose work schedules are such that they would require a very flexible class schedule. To attract these individuals, colleges must undertake massive promotional campaigns and assure that courses and schedules permit the student to choose the subjects, times, and quantity of education that are appropriate to his/her needs. This consumer-oriented philosophy would ensure quality education for all citizens, and reduce the threat of declining enrollments. (JP)

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WITH DECLINING NUMBER OF HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES, WHERE DO WE FIND ENOUGH STUDENTS FOR OUR COLLEGES IN THE 1980's?

Position Paper prepared
for
"Planning for the 80's"
by

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Enrollment and Retention Committee
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Let's face the facts as they are. Statistics show a steady decline in birth rates in the U.S. since 1959. This reduction is translated into students entering our educational institutions at all levels. Grade schools have witnessed this erosion since 1968 and the high schools met a similar fate in the middle of 1970's. The colleges are now facing this trend for the first time.

Although the birth rate peaked in 1959, no appreciable decline in the college student body was experienced until this Fall with its slight decline in enrollment. We have not seen the full impact as yet; it is coming in the 1980's. After all, the peak of graduating high school students was reached in June 1979. From now on, there will be a steady decline of such graduates from year to year, bottoming at about 30% less than today, according to James Furman, executive director, Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE).

The traditional college-age student population is in the 18-24 age group. With the declined enrollment, some of the teachers may be shocked to discover that there are no students to teach one day. They will find a real threat to their career in the possibility of losing their jobs.

NEW OPPORTUNITY

A declining high school student population does not necessarily have to force a reduction of students at the City Colleges of Chicago. We can do something about this situation if we take those steps necessary to avoid the same fate which plagued grade schools and high schools. We do not have to wait for this bad omen to repeat itself, but instead can create opportunities for ourselves and keep the college enrollment at the same pace.

In order to overcome the effects of the declining number of high school graduate population, we must look elsewhere to find the required number of students to fill this gap. But where do we find them?

Taking a positive attitude, we will soon discover that not all high school students who graduated entered an institution of higher learning. Many went to work right after graduation or even before they received their diplomas. Statistics reveal that the current U.S. workforce is only 20 to 30% college educated. This means that the other 70 to 80% of the U.S. labor, or some 100 million strong, have not completed their higher education of work or perhaps never even tried to enroll at a college or university. To view it from a business approach, we have a population of approximately 80 million that could be our potential students if we so desire. In the Chicago area, there are 2 million possible students, while Chicago itself has half that number.

Here is an untapped market waiting for someone to take. These are the potential students who could well fill the void created by the declining birth rate of our nation. They are people who ordinarily do not come to the college because the college, as it functions today, does not fill their needs. This population feels alienated by higher education, and in return they ignore the colleges.

WHAT CAN WE DO TO LURE THIS POPULATION INTO RETURNING TO SCHOOL

One way to lure these people would be to change the traditional philosophy of higher education that has been practiced for decades. We must look at this situation in a different light, one that is more conducive to reality today, one that could produce results and not lengthy debates. We could adapt a businessman's logic to this acute problem.

The businessman struggles to woo customers to buy his products or services. He knows that the customers are there, somewhere, and that they have certain needs. All he now needs is something special that will satisfy the customers' needs. That something must be better than what anyone else can offer his potential customers. This is a marketing approach to solving problems.

We could adapt the same approach and call our potential students clients. Give the public what they want and deserve to receive. Never force on the public what we want and they don't need. We must discover the unsatisfied needs of our potential clients and provide the solutions to them.

PROBABLE UNSATISFIED NEEDS

Most of our potential clients are employed. They would like to take one or more college courses to supplement their present skills, but they are unwilling to go through the college program that our students are required to take now (eg. humanities, english, accounting, social sciences, etc.). If we wave the current requirements and give our potential clients the opportunity to take what they want and not what we want, we will find that people will enroll in greater numbers. Many employed persons have dormant needs and will be willing, able, and responsive to take our offer.

Their need may be to take a marketing class or two. This client could be employed as a salesperson in a retail store and is only interested in courses to fill his immediate career obligation and nothing else. A middle manager may wish to take one or more accounting classes to be able to understand the financial statements of his firm that his boss is constantly talking about. Nothing else would interest him at this time.

Another potential client may wish to take reading, public speaking, and TV acting lessons to enchance his/her career in a public relations position. Nothing more and nothing else. He is not interested in a diploma or certificate, and does not care for culture, grammar, etc. All he wants is to satisfy the unfulfilled need he now has.

THE AGING OF AMERICA

The population of the U.S. is getting older. The bulk of the potential student population could come from this older generation. This group of potential clients was employed for many years and missed the opportunities of higher education completely. Due to economic factors and other reasons beyond their control, college education was outside their reach. Now that their children are grown and they are seeking their own lives, our senior citizens have more time to capture some things they lost in the struggle to make ends meet. They are hungry for knowledge and are willing to return to school if only we will accomodate them on their terms rather than ours.

The needs of older generation may not be compatible with those of the younger generation (which is not yet sure what kind of life to lead). The older people have their careers behind them. They will retire soon. all they are now interested in is to fill the missing gaps which they perceived are necessary to satisfy their remaining years. Such needs may involve improving their skills on the job. (Cooperative Education may fill the need.) Or it may be a case of their careers disappearing due to technological changes in the marketplace, and they need quick retraining programs for other career choices. It may even be a simple case of recreation, the desire to pursue something they always wanted but never had the time for it, e.g., to take up art for the fun of it or

to fill their idle time.

Whatever the needs of our potential clients who do not now attend college, they want to fulfill them their own way, and not ours. If we want to help them and fill our classrooms in the years to come, we had better recognize this overlooked potential student population whose needs are not recognized and take advantage of the availability of this type of student.

Some of these older students may have various obligations which prevent them from attending those college classes which are traditionally scheduled between the hours of 10:00 A.M and 2:00 P.M., times convenient for teachers and day students, but not for this type of student. This misschedule denies us the needed student body and prevents our potential clients from receiving the benefits which they are entitled to. Both sides in this equation lose out.

Other potential clients work the split shift: working days one week, and working nights the next--or some other kind of combination. If we could only address ourselves to this type of problem, we could conceivably enroll many additional students in our colleges.

MARKETING EDUCATION

Even if we decide to take steps necessary to client needs, our problems will not be solved as yet. Few additional students will be attracted by this change in programming alone. Like the businessman who must publicize his product, we must inform the public that we have a fine product to sell which they need badly. A massive promotional campaign should be launched to advertise our new programs,

or non-programs, to our potential clients. We must let the public know what we have to offer and how they, the potential students, will benefit from it, what is there for them to gain from.

Pioneering a new product or service is not an easy task as any businessman would be willing to confess. The rewards obtained from this hard work, however, will be substantial and should be seriously considered. Only survey such firms as Xerox, TI, and IBM, firms that were not afraid to risk their fortunes in the marketplace, and see where they are today.

It is up to us to either watch our enrollments decline from year to year passively or take some bold measures to maintain quality education for all of our citizens by doing something to fill our classes. According to George E. Olson, director of the Research and Development Center at Roosevelt University, their institue and others are recognizing the need for marketing education and are preparing new programs and time schedules to satisfy the needs of their potential target clients and to tap a market that is lightly touched today.

SOLUTIONS

I am not suggesting that we should abandon this or that subject or program. Far from it. We should maintain most of the courses we are now teaching. What I am advocating is that we do not force our new students to take <u>any</u> courses that the students do not wish to take. Once a student takes courses of his own choosing and needs, he may discover later that there are some other courses which will benefit him. But this choice should be left up to the student. He should choose the subject, the time, and the quantity of education he wishes to pursue at a given time.

We in the community colleges have an exceptional opportunity to benefit from this great, untapped market because our tuition is only a fraction of what other private institutions of higher learning are charging now. Since most of the working people are hard pressed to pay the high tuition cost of private schools, they will recognize the advantage in coming to the City Colleges of Chicago.

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